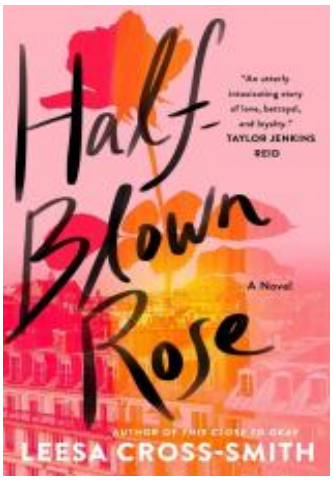
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Half-Blown Rose

by Leesa Cross-Smith



About the Book

An irresistible story of a woman remaking her life after her husband?s betrayal leads to a year of travel, art and passion in Paris, from the award-winning author of THIS CLOSE TO OKAY.

Vincent, having grown up as the privileged daughter of artists, has a lovely life in many ways. At 44, she enjoys strolling the streets of Paris and teaching at the modern art museum; she has a vibrant group of friends; and she?s even caught the eye of a young, charismatic man named Loup. But Vincent is also in Paris to escape a painful betrayal: her husband, Cillian, has published a bestselling book divulging secrets about their marriage and his own past, hinting that when he was a teenager, he may have had a child with a young woman back in Dublin --- before he moved to California and never returned.

Now estranged from her husband, Vincent has agreed to see Cillian again at their son?s wedding the following summer, but Loup introduces new complications. Soon they begin an intense affair, and somewhere between dinners made together, cigarettes smoked in the moonlight, hazy evenings in nightclubs, and long, starry walks along the Seine, Vincent feels herself loosening and blossoming.

In a journey that is both transportive and intimate, HALF-BLOWN ROSE traverses Paris, art, travel, liminal spaces, and the messy complexities of relationships and romance, with excerpts from Cillian?s novel, playlists and journal entries woven throughout. As Cillian does all he can to win her back, Vincent must decide what she wants...and who she will be.

Discussion Guide

1. What are some of the different ways in which we find and define ourselves? How does Vincent? Does this change at all throughout the novel?

2. There are many descriptions of food throughout HALF-BLOWN ROSE, from Vincent and Loup?s eating fruit in her kitchen, to indulgent dinner parties, and more. Discuss what significance or symbolism different foods might have in the story.

3. How would you characterize Vincent, and what specific passages support your characterization? In what ways does she transform over the course of the book?

4. Agathe describes Vincent as a flâneuse because of the hours she spends strolling the streets of Paris. What does this term mean? Discuss the connotations of flâneur and flâneuse, and what being one says about Vincent. In what ways is she a flâneuse, both literally and figuratively? How might this be seen as a subversive act?

5. Discuss the concepts of agency, identity and reinvention in relation to Vincent.

6. Compare and contrast Vincent?s relationships with Cillian and Loup. What does she get from each relationship? Is she able to access different parts of herself when she?s with them? When she?s alone?

7. What kinds of family structures and types of romantic relationships do you see in this novel? Was your reaction to Vincent?s choices or the relationship dynamics in the book ever informed by predominant social/societal norms?

8. What are some examples of actions or gestures that Vincent, Cillian and Loup make to convey their emotions to their loved ones? Are there instances in which you think a gesture is insufficient to communicate feelings?

9. How do you think being in Paris affects Vincent?s emotional journey after Cillian?s betrayal?

10. Examine Cillian?s novel excerpts and Vincent?s journal entries. How do they inform the novel as a whole? What can you tell about them and the way they each perceive the world based on their writing?

11. ?Cillian had his secrets and kept them and kept them and kept them even though Vincent worked hard never to keep anything from him; things that revealed even the parts of her she didn?t particularly like or want to admit...she was forty-four and could keep her own secrets and make her life whatever she wanted it to be instead of waiting and waiting and waiting...? (pages 103?104). How does the above quote shed light on Vincent and Cillian?s relationship, as well as how Cillian?s betrayal changed Vincent?

12. In Vincent?s travel journal, she considers the liminal nature of travel and certain spaces surrounding it, like airports. Discuss liminal spaces in the book and why they might resonate with Vincent. Are you drawn to any liminal spaces in your own life?

13. ?I want you to know that I?m sorry for the way I handled the situation with Shalene Byrne. Snatching you away like that. I never thought it was right...I knew it was wrong...but it?s what I had to do in order for you to have the life you deserve.?(140). Discuss this quote from Cillian?s novel. What does it reveal about Cillian/Cian?s father? What does the larger context reveal about Cillian/Cian, and how his father?s mindset affected his behavior?

14. If you were Vincent, would you be able to forgive Cillian? And would you go back to him?

15. Vincent notes to Loup: ?I?ve read this book before, by the way...what we?re doing...I know how it ends. If a man were writing this story I?d have to die, right? You?ve read ANNA KARENINA...MADAME BOVARY?? (173). What does she mean? How does HALF-BLOWN ROSE play on or subvert classic literary themes surrounding women and sex?

Author Bio

Leesa Cross-Smith is a homemaker and the author of seven books. She was longlisted for the 2022 Mark Twain American Voice in Literature Award and the 2021 Joyce Carol Oates Prize. Her third novel, HALF-BLOWN ROSE, received the Coups de C?ur recognition from the American Library in Paris and was the Amazon Editors? Spotlight pick for June 2022. It was also the inaugural pick for Amazon Editorial Director Sarah Gelman?s book club, Sarah Selects, and a Barnes & Noble Book Club pick. She lives in Kentucky with her husband and two children.

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